

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D
ON MARCH 6, 2004
in Baltimore, Maryland

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Docket No. DCA 04 MM015

Wednesday,
March 31, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

ALEJANDIO GONZALEZ

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. TURRELL: Good morning, it is March 31, we
3 are at the Marriott Hotel interviewing some witnesses
4 from the Lady D accident on March 6.

5 My name is Morgan Turrell. And I am
6 interviewing?

7 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Alejandro Gonzalez, Puerto
8 Rico Air International Guard.

9 MR. TURRELL: Sir, would you please spell your
10 name, sir?

11 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: A-L-E-J-A-N-D-I-O,
12 G-O-N-Z-A-L-E-Z.

13 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And you have someone
14 representing you here today? If you would introduce
15 yourself.

16 SERGEANT ACOSTA: I am Sergeant Acosta.

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And, Sergeant Gonzalez, if
18 you would please tell me your position at the Puerto
19 Rico International Guard?

20 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I am a staff sergeant and
21 I
22 am --

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And what were you doing in
24 Baltimore on March 6?

25 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: March 6, we were doing a

1 tourist, like tourist and the other -- that is what we
2 were doing.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So, will you just in your
4 own words, just tell us in your own words what happened
5 that afternoon, with as much detail as you can provide.

6 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: You want from the moment
7 that we entered the boat or --

8 MR. TURRELL: Let's take it from the first
9 time you rode a water taxi that day.

10 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. The first time, I
11 don't know which time, I remember that we took a taxi
12 boat that was bigger than the second one. I remember
13 that we were joking, you know, we were talking in
14 Spanish because that is our first language. And that is
15 all about the first trip. I remember that, I don't
16 remember whether the captain or the, or the first mate,
17 he say about the life jackets, they were under the
18 seat, that we weren't -- in time, because it is not a
19 requirement. And after that we went to other --

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

21 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: After that, we took the
22 second boat, the Lady D, to the Fort McHenry.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

24 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: We were in Fort McHenry
25 for about one and a half hour. More than one hour. And

1 we were enjoying ourselves and after that, we entered
2 the taxi, Lady D.

3 I remember we were joking between us and
4 because the guy said that were late, we entered the
5 boat, the last two entered the boat. After that, we
6 went to the other side. I don't remember to what point
7 they were going, I remember that we took out the boat,
8 okay, I remember that there was a second, little -- I
9 remember that I had conversation that we are going to
10 receive, the weather is going to be worse and I
11 remember the captain, he said, the life jackets were
12 under the seats, just in case. And he looked worried,
13 but, he looked fine to us. He was standing up, trying
14 to, to maintain the boat in position. After he hit the
15 second one and he tried to, to return to one of the
16 shores. I don't remember which one, which one of them,
17 because I don't know the area. I remember that he was
18 joking with me that the boat was going to be -- that we
19 were going to the -- the pictures.

20 Okay. Then the boat flipped over. Okay.
21 After that, if I remember, there was about three or
22 four -- I didn't have time to catch my breath, I don't
23 swim. I remember that I was inside the boat trying to
24 go out, that it was hard for me. I was trying to catch
25 one of the life jackets that was floating down. It was

1 really bad, the weather was -- I remember, you know, I
2 just said, okay, it is my time, I am going out. And
3 then I pushed one of the windows, when I pushed one of
4 the windows, I don't know if I broke the window because
5 I remember that, the he opened one and he go out of the
6 windows, he and -- I think one of those guys opened all
7 of the windows. I know that I just, and going outside,
8 and -- Acosta and brought me from and just pulled me
9 over the boat, after that I was catching my breath and
10 I remember that -- one man, he was an old man, white
11 haired, little, little fat and he was, we took him
12 from, we pulled him over the boat, after I was through
13 catching my breath and then a lady to called help with
14 the first mate, to put him over the boat. Antonio
15 Acosta and me, we pulled the man over the boat. And
16 then Antonio Acosta -- CPR. I was still trying to
17 catch my breath. And then after that I remember the
18 lady calls for -- And Antonio told him there as a
19 female, you know, it was going down and he grabbed the
20 female and he put her over the boat.

21 I remember that the first mate, after they
22 catch the breath, he was like drowning in the water
23 inside the boat, and then Antonio told me to stay with
24 him because I was the more -- and I was with him.
25 Talking to him, trying to make him awake or then, after

1 that, the Navy guys said come. It was so quick, you
2 know.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

4 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: It looks like a real boat
5 --

6 MR. TURRELL: When you first stepped onboard
7 the boat, can you tell me where you were seated?

8 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I was seated behind the
9 captain.

10 MR. TURRELL: Were you the first person behind
11 the captain or the second person?

12 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I don't remember if I was
13 the first, I was the second.

14 (Pause.)

15 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I remember that when the
16 weather becomes too, so, becomes bad, the first mate he
17 told us to move to one side of the boat, just to
18 balance the boat. Then he said, no, stay in your seats
19 and when the boat begins to wave, he said, move to the
20 side of the boat, to the other side of the boat from
21 where we were, just to balance the boat.

22 MR. TURRELL: So, the mate told you to move
23 from the starboard, to the right side, to the left
24 side.

25 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: That is right. Just to

1 balance the boat, but then the wind hits the boat.

2 MR. TURRELL: Can you tell me where, were
3 people moved on the port side when the boat actually
4 tipped over, were people displaced or had they moved
5 back?

6 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: No, there was, like I told
7 you, it was so quick, I remember that he told move to
8 that, no, the people begin to do that, first, before,
9 before, he said, move to that side, but he said, no,
10 stay in your seats.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

12 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: And than after that he
13 said, no, move to that side just to balance the boat.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

15 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: And then the boat flipped.

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Now, when the, when the,
17 when you first stepped onboard the boat, did you
18 notice, when you stepped onboard, was the boat lifting
19 at all, or was it bouncing around, was it, what was the
20 orientation of the boat, was it flat?

21 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Was flat, I see nothing,
22 nothing wrong in the boat at this moment.

23 MR. TURRELL: Could you see the pontoons?

24 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Well, the --

25 MR. TURRELL: No, no, no. When you first

1 boarded the boat, could you see them?

2 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I wasn't looking at down.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Can I get your height and
4 weight?

5 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Five, eight, 205.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay, 205 pounds.

7 And can you tell me also what you may have
8 heard the captain say, I know you were one of the
9 closest people to the captain, on the radio in
10 particular, did you hear any transmissions or --

11 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I remember that when we
12 entered the boat, he said that there was 25 people in
13 the boat, and then we are going, one point to another
14 one, to another and I don't remember the response said,
15 because I wasn't, you know, my attention wasn't there
16 at that moment.

17 MR. TURRELL: Sure.

18 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: He was talking with
19 another. And then I remember after that that he said,
20 I don't know what he said, because I wasn't, I was
21 aware of what is going on at that moment, but, I know
22 that he was, he was received communication. One of the
23 transmission said that the water is going to be bad,
24 worse than in the moment. And with bad winds of 30
25 knots, I think, something like that.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And what did, how did he
2 respond to that?

3 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I can't say, I don't
4 remember.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Okay. Can you tell me if,
6 since you were the second person, there was Sergeant
7 Acosta and yourself, who was sitting next to you?

8 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I can't tell you.

9 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: We were joking between --
10 I remember the -- the little girl that --

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Across.

12 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes, but don't remember,
13 I don't remember who was behind me, because we were all
14 the time looking to the front.

15 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

16 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I don't know, the first
17 mate, he was in the back of the boat.

18 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

19 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: That part I remember, but,
20 I don't remember the people, and I know that Antonio
21 Acosta and lady, he was on the other side of her.

22 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And can you tell me to
23 the best of your knowledge, how you think you escaped
24 from the boat? Was it through the side, through the
25 front?

1 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. It wasn't one of
2 the sides, but was the side where the steering wheels
3 were.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay. The right side.

5 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I remember that because I
6 felt the steering wheel, and I know what part of the
7 boat I was at the moment.

8 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

9 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: And before I say, okay --
10 I think I was in the wrong side of the boat.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And can you describe for
12 me the actions of the boat tipping over for me?

13 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. For my side --

14 MR. TURRELL: On this little boat, sure.

15 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. Okay. For me it was
16 like this, you know, the first part that I told --

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: The water was --

19 MR. TURRELL: If you would just orient the
20 boat for me.

21 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. This is, that is the
22 boat.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

24 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: That is the front of the
25 boat.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: And it went like this.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So the fore starboard
4 pontoon --

5 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: That is the way that I saw
6 it. That is the way that I saw it. You know, like
7 this side and then flipped over.

8 MR. TURRELL: Okay. What makes you think or
9 what makes you believe that?

10 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. When I was looking
11 at the water, I saw that big boat of the part hit the
12 water first.

13 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

14 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: You know, and then after
15 that, I saw that all the boat went down.

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

17 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: For me and the way that I
18 saw, that was the first part to touch the water.

19 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So you would describe the
20 turning over as not merely by the side, but there was a
21 launch element to it.

22 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: It was like the boat was
23 moving and then when the hit came, you know, hit like
24 this and then I saw this part begin and then all the
25 boat flipped.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And how long do you
2 estimate the sequence took from the first time you
3 started moving to the time you were over, in seconds or
4 minutes?

5 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I think no more than a
6 minute.

7 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Okay. And who, how did you
8 get on top, did you get on top of the boat after the
9 boat flipped over? Did you manage to get on top or
10 were you busy getting people from underneath? Do you
11 at any point get on top the Lady D as it was overturned
12 in the water, do you actually get on top of it?

13 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes, I get on top of the
14 boat, when, you know, I get out of, from being inside
15 the boat, they grabbed me and they pulled me up.

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

17 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: On the boat.

18 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And when you were on top
19 of the boat, can you tell me where you were in relation
20 to the boat?

21 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Exactly the part, I don't
22 remember, but --

23 MR. ACOSTA: In the middle.

24 MR. TURRELL: Middle.

25 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Like in the middle, yes.

1 MR. ACOSTA: Because that is where we put the
2 first mate.

3 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: First mate.

4 MR. ACOSTA: And first you were like, when the
5 boat was down like this, and I asked him to help me
6 with the other guy I was trying to get up, so onto the
7 backside.

8 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: With the backside.

9 MR. ACOSTA: The engine end, and he helped me
10 bring him over and then he stayed over.

11 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And I do have some notes
13 here, you have been doing this, you were a fire
14 fighter, is that correct?

15 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes.

16 MR. TURRELL: So, can you tell me from your
17 experience what the rescue was like, the effectiveness
18 of it?

19 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: For me they were fine, you
20 know, the way they answered the call. They move quick.
21 The Navy guys they were, they moved quick and then,
22 even they, when they jumped into the water, they never
23 think what they were doing, they just jump into the
24 water without the proper equipment. They just wanted
25 to try to save, to save people, that is what they did.

1 There was the mother of the boy who died, she was
2 yelling that there were kids inside the boat and then
3 when they heard that, they just jumped, you know.
4 After that, they -- The captain of the Navy boat, he
5 put the boat quickly on the side and the people began
6 to go inside the Navy boat. That was quick, that was
7 very quick.

8 MR. TURRELL: Can you tell me either before
9 the boat turned over or your first, when you first,
10 when you came up out of the water, can you tell me any
11 landmark or describe anything you saw, anything near by
12 that would help pinpoint where this occurred?

13 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: No, not exactly, no.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

15 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I don't know the area.

16 MR. TURRELL: These are a list of photographs
17 taken by your colleague.

18 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Oh, yes.

19 MR. TURRELL: Just from your knowledge, you
20 were sitting next to him, when these photographs were
21 taken in relation to the capsizing and it was shortly t
22 thereafter, seconds, a minute?

23 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Exactly, I can't tell you,
24 but there was like a few moments before, like no more
25 than 30 seconds, or one minute.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: You know, because he said
3 he that was joking, we are going to capsize and then he
4 began to take the pictures and then we realize that
5 that was going to happen.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So it was less than a
7 minute.

8 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes.

9 MR. TURRELL: I think --

10 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Everything happened -- and
11 then the boat capsized.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So I do have your notes
13 here. I am going to let you just brief read through
14 them and see if there is anything you like to
15 elaborate.

16 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay.

17 MR. TURRELL: I am going to pause the
18 recording just for a moment.

19 (Pause.)

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay. We are resuming the
21 interview. And Sergeant Gonzalez is there anything you
22 would like to add at this point?

23 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I would like to say here,
24 I never heard any thunder or rain, when we go out from
25 the, from the Fort McHenry, the weather looked fine,

1 you know, after that, it was like 160 when the weather
2 come back, you know, turned to bad, like, 160, like 59,
3 you know.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And can you tell me
5 roughly how far from shore you were from Fort McHenry
6 when this accident occurred, to your knowledge?

7 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: No, not really, because,
8 like I told you I don't know the area. I heard after
9 that, one of the Navy guys said that it was like 100
10 feet. Exactly I can't tell you how many feet.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And were you paying
12 attention to perhaps the land before you flipped over
13 so can you tell us where you were --

14 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: No, not really because
15 like I told you we were joking around.

16 MR. TURRELL: If we have any other questions,
17 will you allow us to call you and do a follow up
18 interview in the future?

19 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Yes.

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay. If you would, we will go
21 ahead and finish the interview now. This is Morgan
22 Turrell, it is March 31 at 8:45 and this concludes the
23 interview.

24 Please acknowledge that you are being
25 recorded?

1 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: I --

2 MR. TURRELL: Just yes.

3 SERGEANT GONZALEZ: Okay. Yes, it is being
4 recorded.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Thank you.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)